



# SCOTT FITZGERALD

## SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

**March 2, 2017**

**Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety  
Special Session Assembly Bill 2**

Dear Representative Spiros and Committee Members:

Several years ago I had the opportunity to sit in on Dodge County's Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) Court. At the time, the program was solely focused on OWI offenders, and was the largest alternative treatment court program in the state. Overseen by circuit court judge Brian Pfitzinger, the program had graduated 68 OWI offenders, and out of those 68 defendants, only one individual reoffended. The experience gave me a profound appreciation for the positive impact that TAD courts can have on a community, and spurred my commitment to providing adequate funding to ensure that these programs can expand to other areas of the state.

Alternatives to sentencing, and the corresponding treatment programs that TAD courts offer, are not only vital to public safety, but have actually been proven to be a more efficient and effective channel for state investment than standard punitive corrections programs. Despite persistent efforts by the state legislature to increase penalties for alcohol and drug-related crimes, Wisconsin continues to see an alarming rate of recidivism with nearly fifty thousand third time OWI offenders, and drug-related property crime rates remain at alarming levels. It is clear that traditional penalties have not deterred those with serious substance abuse issues from modifying their behavior.

Unlike simply hiking monetary penalties and jail time, these alternative programs have been proven effective at treating substance abuse and curbing recidivism. According to a 2012 study by the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, drug court participants were significantly less likely to relapse to drug use or engage in criminal activity than offenders undergoing traditional treatment programs. Further, participants were more likely than comparison offenders to be enrolled in school and saw a dramatically lower rate of family conflict.

In addition to the social and societal benefits, these TAD programs will save Wisconsin taxpayers millions of dollars in corrections costs. According to a four year study by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, participants in state TAD programs were nine times less likely to return to prison than other offenders. This translates to an average

STATE CAPITOL

P.O. BOX 7882 • MADISON, WISCONSIN 53707-7882 • SEN.FITZGERALD@LEGIS.WISCONSIN.GOV

TELEPHONE: (608) 266-5660

savings of \$1.93 for every dollar invested in TAD programs. In 2013, a progress assessment on the same study showed that local TAD programs have averted over 200,000 incarceration days, saving the state of Wisconsin more than fifteen million dollars.

Due to the overwhelming success of this approach, Wisconsin's existing TAD programs have been highly in demand, with grants now helping to support over 50 treatment courts and diversion programs statewide, with some counties or tribes operating multiple programs. Existing appropriations were unable to fund all of the counties that requested TAD programs during the most recent expansion, and additional funding is needed to allow these programs to continue to grow and expand to additional Wisconsin communities.

Today I ask the members of the Assembly Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee for their support of this bill, and thank Representative Nygren for his continuous work on addressing substance abuse and addiction issues facing our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Fitzgerald", with a stylized, cursive script.

Senator Scott Fitzgerald  
13<sup>th</sup> Senate District

STATE CAPITOL

P.O. Box 7882 • MADISON, WISCONSIN 53707-7882 • [SEN.FITZGERALD@LEGIS.WISCONSIN.GOV](mailto:SEN.FITZGERALD@LEGIS.WISCONSIN.GOV)

TELEPHONE: (608) 266-5660